

2016 Presidential Election Research Project

In this class, we will situate the 2016 election into broader principles based on political science research and historical examples. The research paper is a three-part assignment and accounts for 45% of your grade.

A key theme in this course is related to theories of voting. The two earliest bodies of research concluded that voters were largely ignorant and indifferent towards politics (“minimal effects” theory). These classics are named after the universities where they were developed: the Columbia and Michigan schools. The Columbia school relied on community studies about voter behavior and argues that people develop their preferences from “opinion leaders” within their social groups. Thus voters tap into their racial, religious, gender, economic and professional identities and follow opinion leaders from those groups.

The Michigan school relied on data from national surveys to study voting choice and behavior. Their argument is that party identification serves as a strong psychological attachment and is more predictive of vote choice than any other single factor. They explain this through the “funnel of causality”, in which partisan identification conditions the acquisition and acceptance of political information.

Years later, the Rochester school (rational choice) argued that voters reward incumbents (or incumbent parties) who have benefited them and punish those who have not. Thus elections act as a referendum on current leaders and their policies. As voters make retrospective evaluations based on performance, campaign events aid in their judgments. This perspective emphasizes the “Three C’s” of campaigns: Campaign issues, perceptions of Candidates, and Campaign events.

You will select a historical presidential election between 1800 and 2004 that you would like to study. In doing so, you will evaluate the merits of the three schools of thought on campaign effects and argue for one perspective over the others as the best explanation for vote choice in that election. The project will consist of three parts.

Annotated Bibliography (10%) – In this exercise, you will identify 6 reliable sources for your paper on the election of your choice (newspaper articles, books, peer-review articles, periodical features, etc.), cite them properly (APA format), and complete the form posted on Pilot. This assignment is intended to help you find and identify reliable resources. As you read and describe these resources, it should help you organize your paper, it allows your professor to provide early feedback, and it prevents procrastination. You can use material on the syllabus for your paper, but the annotated bibliography must include resources not used in the class. **Due Friday, October 21**

Historical Election Paper (20%)– This paper examines and analyzes a previous presidential election (1800-2004). After writing a tight summary of the historical background to the election, students will review the key campaign events in that election. Next, students will describe the results of the election focusing on voting trends (regional, demographic, etc.). Finally, the students will make an argument for how one school of thought (Columbia, Michigan, Rochester) is most satisfying in explaining vote choice in this election. This paper should be 4-6 pages in length, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font. **Due Friday, November 4**

2016 Election Paper (15%) – This paper follows the same approach as the historical election paper but instead evaluates the 2016 election through the prism followed by a comparison of the 2016 election with the election that you studied. This paper should be 3-4 pages in length, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font. **Due Tuesday, December 13.**

Political Science Reference and Instruction Librarian, **Mandy Shannon**, is available to help with the research process (mandy.shannon@wright.edu) as is Dr. Hannah.

The University Writing Center (122 Student Success Center -- 775-4186) and the WSU Writing Web, (www.cola.wright.edu/dept/eng/wsweb/) are free services that provide excellent resources to all Wright State students (writingctr@wright.edu).

For more information on the three perspectives, the following resource is posted on Pilot.¹

Shaw, Daron. 2006. "What We Know (And Don't Know) About Presidential Campaigns." In *The Race to 270: The Electoral College and the Campaign Strategies of 2000 and 2004*. pp. 17-40.

¹ Perspectives of voter choice will also be covered in lectures and additional readings.